

Summary of the Proficiency Testing Committee Teleconference October 10, 1996

The Proficiency Testing (PT) Committee met by teleconference on Thursday, October 10, 1996. The meeting was led by PT Committee Chair, Ms. Andrea M. Jirka of the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) Region 7, Environmental Sciences Division. A list of action items is given in Attachment A. A list of participants is given in Attachment B. An agenda for the teleconference is given in Attachment C. The meeting opened with a discussion of the August 28, 1996, minutes. The chair of the committee asked for corrections or comments; there were none.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this meeting was to review the status of several relevant activities and to discuss selected Chapter 2 issues. Teleconference participants discussed the following key items:

- ! Discussions with EPA PT Program Contacts
- ! ELAB Input to the PT Committee
- ! Appendix on Provider Requirements
- ! Field of Testing --- Will accreditation be by analyte or group of analytes, by matrix, by method, or by some combination of these parameters?
- ! Paired Samples --- Will there be single or paired samples for analytes/fields?
- ! Frequency of Studies (Rounds of Testing) --- How often will performance testing (PT) samples be submitted to laboratories for analysis?
- ! Loss of Accreditation --- What are the criteria for loss of accreditation? What constitutes failure for performance evaluation (PE) studies? How does this fit into the overall accreditation process?
- ! Reinstatement of Accreditation --- What opportunities should be provided to laboratories to recover from failed studies?

STATUS OF ACTIVITIES

EPA Program Contacts

Ms. Jirka and Ms. Wendy Coleman are talking with PE program contacts. Mr. Tom Coyner proposed that he prepare a standard format for the matrix showing the technical and format features for PE programs.

ELAB Input to the PT Committee

Ms. Jeanne Mourrain reported that the Environmental Laboratory Advisory Board (ELAB) will provide advice to the PT Committee from the private sector through the NELAC Board of Directors. This advice will be generated with the aid of a subcommittee, to be formed by ELAB, that will develop recommendations for standards for the PT program. ELAB represents the private sector, whereas the subcommittee could consist of individuals from both government and the private sector. This subcommittee provides a forum for ELAB to influence PT decisions, although the NELAC PT Committee makes all final decisions. It has been proposed that the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) be represented on this subcommittee. Ms. Jirka indicated that the PT Committee found this acceptable.

Mr. Chuck Wibby expressed concern that the efforts of the ELAB subcommittee and the PT Committee should be coordinated. It was proposed that a PT Committee member serve on the ELAB subcommittee. This would provide a conduit for feedback to the PT Committee. All the teleconference participants agreed that this cross-representation would be valuable. Mr. Matthew Caruso volunteered to be the PT Committee representative to the subcommittee. There would also be a representative from the ELAB Committee on the PT Committee.

Appendix on Provider Requirements

The PT subcommittee on provider requirements met to discuss the issue of sample comparability. A report of this meeting is available, and costing information has been submitted to Ms. Jirka. The subcommittee reported that it is in agreement with the appendix on provider requirements. The PT Committee will review and discuss the subcommittee product, Draft Appendices A and B.

CHAPTER 2 ISSUES

Field of Testing

There was considerable discussion of the definition of the field of testing. Parameters that would define the field of testing include: (1) the regulatory program; (2) the analyte(s); (3) the analytical method; and (4) the sample/matrix type. The principal topic of discussion was whether the analytical method should be specified. It was reported that numerous States and several PT programs run by other organizations such as the American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA) define their PT in terms of program, analyte(s), and method; some States do not specify the method. With one exception, the PT Committee agreed that the field of testing should be defined in terms of program and analyte(s) and that the method should not be specified.

Discussion continued as to whether every sample should contain every analyte within a particular program. It was noted that this is not always possible; for example, several samples are needed to include all the organic analytes that are found in common groups or suites of compounds. It was suggested that all compounds within a suite be reported, realizing that those not included in the sample(s) would likely be reported as “not detected.” Members of the committee were polled, and all agreed that all analytes in a suite should be reported, even though not all may be included in the PT sample(s). There was general agreement that accreditation apply to those analytes which the laboratory analyzes and reports, regardless of whether they were actually in the PT samples(s). Also, all members of the committee were in agreement that accreditation for a partial suite was acceptable. This raised another issue: whether (1) accreditation should be

granted for all analytes in a sample even if only a certain percentage of the total were measured acceptably, or (2) accreditation should be granted only for those analytes measured acceptably. This issue was not resolved.

The issue of defining accreditation in terms of the method was again raised. A concern was expressed that restricting accreditation to a method/analyte combination would be encumbering and too expensive. Most of the committee members again expressed the opinion that accreditation should not be defined in terms of method, though some disagreed with this opinion.

Paired Samples

The use of paired samples was discussed. It was noted that the use of paired samples increases costs and can cause confusion in the laboratory. On the positive side, analysis of pairs provides more information (e.g., a measure of repeatability) and increases the chances of achieving a passing grade. A poll was taken, and the majority agreed that single samples, not paired samples, should be used in proficiency testing.

Frequency of Testing

The members of the PT Committee agreed that two rounds of testing (two studies) per year were appropriate.

Loss of Accreditation

Some discussion was held about the loss of accreditation. Earlier, it had been proposed that passing two studies (rounds of PT testing) would indicate a laboratory was proficient and eligible for accreditation, while failing two studies would result in a loss of accreditation.

Reinstatement of Accreditation

The idea of supplying a makeup sample to a laboratory shortly after determination of failure in order to give that laboratory a second chance at accreditation was discussed briefly. There was general agreement that only one makeup sample would be provided if this concept is eventually approved.

NEXT MEETING

Ms. Jirka noted that the committee must have Chapter 2 ready for a vote at the next interim meeting. Members suggested a face-to-face meeting. All were in agreement on the need for such a meeting, and it was suggested that this meeting occur before Thanksgiving. Ms. Jirka concluded the teleconference by announcing the time and date of the next teleconference, which will be held from 3 to 5pm on Thursday, October 24, 1996.

Note: While decision points were discussed, no votes were taken. We hope to vote on these items at the next meeting (Oct. 24).

ACTION ITEMS
Proficiency Testing Committee
October 10, 1996

ACTION	Date Completed
PT Committee members will prepare to continue discussion of loss and reinstatement of accreditation.	

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS
Proficiency Testing Committee Teleconference
October 10, 1996

Name	Affiliation	Phone Numbers
Matthew Caruso	NYS Dept. of Health Env. Lab. Approval Program	T: 518/485-5570 F: 518/485-5568
Tom Coyner	Analytical Products Group, Inc.	T: 614/423-4200 F: 614/423-5588
Andrea Jirka, Chair	USEPA Region 7, Environmental Services Division	T: 913/551-5091 F: 913/551-5218
Jim Larkin (for Jerry Thoma)	Environmental Health Labs	T: 219/233-4777 F: 219/233-8207
Jeanne Mourrain, NELAC Executive Director	EPA/NERL, Research Triangle Park	T: 919/541-1120 F: 919/541-4101
Anne Rhyne	TX Natural Resource Conservation Commission	T: 512/239-1291 F: 512/239-2550
Chuck Wibby	Environmental Resources Associates	T: 303/431-8454 F: 303/421-0159
Bill Gutknecht, Support Contractor	Research Triangle Institute	T: 919/541-6883 F: 919/541-8778

**AGENDA
PROFICIENCY TESTING CONFERENCE CALL
October 10, 1996**

1. Administrative
2. Review minutes
3. Status of activities
 - Discussions with EPA PT program contacts
 - ELAB input to PT Committee
 - Appendix on provider requirements (Subcommittee)
4. Discussion - Selected Chapter 2 issues
 - Accredited by field of testing? (Confirm)
 - Will there be single or paired samples for analytes/fields?
 - Frequency of studies
 - Criteria for loss of accreditation (due to PE performance)
 - What constitutes failure for PE studies? (Currently, failure = two unacceptable studies)
 - How does this fit into the overall accreditation process?
 - Opportunities for labs to recover from failed studies